

# RAISED BILL #5176

Dear Public Safety Committee Members, including Co-Chairs Maria Horn and Catherine Osten:

First of all, thank you for raising this Bill to define in the Connecticut General Statutes who a First Responder is, while including the various professions so they can be classified and referenced as such moving forward.

I was lucky enough to join a zoom meeting set up by State Representative Dorinda Borer on February 4, 2022 and had the honor in speaking to both Co-Chair, Maria Horn and Catherine Osten, however I have not had the pleasure of speaking with the rest of the Committee members and therefore would like to offer a brief history of who I am and share a few stories and give a few examples, both statistically and personally, upon why I am in full support of defining the various professions that include who First Responders are, which will help with proper classification status, more specifically for all Public Safety 911 Telecommunicators.

I was hired in 2006 as a full-time employee with West Haven 911 as a Public Safety Telecommunicator in a combined Center, which means they handle, Police, Fire and Medical Emergency and Non-Emergency Calls. In 2013, I was promoted to Dispatch Shift Supervisor of my crew on the evening shift. In 2018, I was promoted to Director of West Haven 911, however am still current on all required Certifications to keep my status as a 911 Dispatcher active should I need to assist in the orderly operation of the Center or in an emergency situation.

Factually speaking, New York has defined the term as **"first responder in communications"** .....  
"any individual who is a public safety dispatcher, emergency responder, emergency operator, emergency complain operator and emergency services dispatcher who meets the minimum requirements established by a local government, department or agency including but not limited to, police and sheriff's departments as well as fire, rescue and emergency services departments. Such individual is responsible for the administration or supervision of life saving communication services for emergency situations. Additionally, it states "to the extent practicable, employers of a first responder in communications shall provide training to maintain and enhance the knowledge, skills and proficiency of such first responder in communications."  
"This act shall take effect immediately".

NY, NJ, MA, CA, WV CO, KN, TX and many more in the United States have passed a bill with their legislature supporting their 911 dispatchers and agreed to Reclassify them as First Responders and I surely hope that CT will be the next to hop on board and support these heroic, courageous lifesavers. New Hampshire, Vermont and Rhode Island are soon to be next.

Public Safety Telecommunicators are most commonly known as 911 Dispatchers and are certified through American Heart Association, on how to do CPR, which includes CPR for infants, children and adults along with training for AED use, if it's available. Most, if not all Public Safety Telecommunicators have partaken in Active Shooter/Assailant course at least once available by State Police or other Accredited Agencies. Additionally, training is constantly done with multiple local agencies to keep our knowledge up to par on the matter. Factually, Active Shooter or Assailant situations continue to bombard this country and all over the world.

All West Haven 911 Dispatchers are certified by the International Academy of Emergency Dispatchers in Emergency Medical Dispatching (aka EMD), which teaches and trains dispatchers to provide life-saving instructions, like CPR, assistance with the use of certain medications and the ever so popular Narcan instructions that have been saving several lives each day. Not to mention how to apply a tourniquet, control bleeding, handle suicidal callers and hope that you can keep them on the line until more help arrives, we administer Aspirin for cardiac calls, provide instructions to parties stuck inside a sinking vehicle .....and the life saving measures GO ON!!!!!! This Certification alone allows them to be trained in providing post-dispatch instructions and pre-arrival instructions to the Caller of an emergency situation until the Firefighter Paramedics or EMT's arrive. This is why we keep saying we ARE "the FIRST, first responder" in any emergency call.

This bill should define each profession that encompasses who a First Responder is. I've given you facts about who 911 Public Safety Telecommunicators are and can tell you that most of the northeast States have either gone forward and passed a bill classifying their Dispatchers as First Responders and some states are in the process of it but are nearing the acceptance of such. There should be no reason why Connecticut should not stand up for their 911 Public Safety Telecommunicators and define them in the CGS as first responders.

I am going to attach some personal calls that I've experienced should you wish to read them, but kindly request that you consider the above my written testimony showing full support of the passage of this bill to add literature to the C.G.S. defining a Dispatcher aka Public Safety Telecommunicator as being a FIRST RESPONDER.

Thank you for your time, consideration and hard work that you are doing for us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jennifer A. Amendola" followed by the date "2/21/2022".

Jennifer A. Amendola (Testifier)  
City of West Haven  
Director of ERS (aka West Haven 911)



## Informational —

Below are my personal experiences, should you wish to read them to get an idea of the experiences I have gone through as a 911 Dispatcher. Although I could be here for days writing to you about the millions of calls I've taken since 2006, here are a few just to give you an idea of what a FIRST – first responder is:

I delivered twin babies via the phone prior to the Fire Department's arrival on scene due to the hysterical first time dad giving the wrong address to another town before they realized it was a West Haven call and it was transferred to me where I was able to give pre-arrival instructions to the dad of exactly what to do while his wife's water had broken and delivery was imminent. That was one of the best calls to hear not one but two babies take their first breath and cry out.

I answered the call of an emotionally disturbed 21 year old female who lived on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of a home who was so depressed and embarrassed of the failure she had become to her parents that she decided it was time to end her life, so she took a knife and bottle of pills and climbed to the roof. Luckily due to training and experience from observing other veteran dispatchers, I simply became her friend and let her talk while my partner dispatched the police and ambulance there. I insisted that I had done things that I thought disappointed my parents at times, but they actually were proud for me standing up for myself and to not give up so easily as it could be that same situation for her. I was calm and spoke to her like I had known her for years and just got her to tell me all about what happened until the police arrived. She began to threaten to cut her wrists, take the pills then jump but I convinced her that my friend, Christina (an officer of WHPD), was going to talk to her a bit more while I took the next call. I made her feel comfortable when I said that Christina's sister was once in her shoes so I asked her to do me a favor and just listen to what Christina had to share with her about her problem and with that the female agreed to drop the weapon and pills and enter the window to Officer Christina and in fact saved that woman's life and that of her family from the devastation of losing their daughter simply because she had failed a class in college and was afraid she'd be kicked out of school. It was a bad situation that could've turned worse, but me answering that FIRST CALL before any of the responders could arrive, calmed her enough in just speaking to her like a friend who cared about her problems so she wasn't just another statistic of suicide.


I took an absolutely hysterical call from a mom whose 4 year old daughter stopped breathing, was unconscious and had no pulse. This was just four days before Christmas, by the way. She was too upset to let go of her baby girl to put her down in case it was her last time to hold her and refused to listen to me in helping to walk her through giving CPR over the phone. I begged like I had never done before to please do as I said so she may have the chance of watching her daughter open her Christmas presents in a few days. A sudden jolt of "oh my god" set in and the mom put the daughter flat on the ground and I gave her specific instructions on how to give CPR to which she did so perfectly that by the time the Paramedics arrived within minutes, the child had a pulse. The day after Christmas I found out from the Paramedic, that the little girl had made a full recovery and was doing just fine at home – and DID get to open her Christmas presents that morning.

I took a call from a woman screaming that her brother was having a psychotic episode and was outside with a gun waiving it at people and said he was going to kill someone or himself. She didn't know what to do because she was home alone with her mom who was elderly with paralysis due to a stroke and was bed-ridden and that she had her 4 children ranging from age 18 months to 7 years old in the house with her. My partner started the police officers to the address as I stayed on the phone with the female obtaining as much information on her brother as possible to have it relayed to the responders that were enroute for their own safety, as well as so they knew what they were looking for. She kept telling me she thinks her mom will be fine and she'll just tell her kids to stay inside and she'll go outside looking for him. Again, based on my training and experience, I knew that it was going to be best to keep her inside with those children until the police had the scene under control. While they arrived outside she kept asking me what was going on outside with her brother and I just kept reassuring her that we were trying to find him and then would try to calm him enough to drop the weapon so he didn't hurt himself, the officers or people around him. Unfortunately, within minutes of saying that I heard the officers on the other radio scream that he had shot himself in the head and was dead. She said to me at that point "what was that I think I heard a gunshot", what happened, I'm going outside to check" and again I had to convince her to stay inside and I told her a few things to do until the officers came inside to her but that she needed to keep herself, her mom and those children safe inside the home. Knowing that he was dead and hearing the gunshot in the background was a noise I won't forget. But, again, I was her FIRST CALL and the first person to offer any guidance of what she should do before the situation escalated to being much worse for the public or the responders.

I had a male in his 30's call me to say he was in his kitchen cooking and the food on top of the stove had caught fire from grease, which spread to the potholders next to the stove, which was next to the paper towels, which was below the wooden cabinets and he was afraid it would start spreading. I told him to exit the home and he said he would not do that without trying to extinguish it himself. He said he already grabbed the fire extinguisher under the cabinet but he didn't know how to use it or what to do. I gave him instructions to pull the pin, hold the lever and spray in a back and forth motion but not directly in one location. He did what I said and with an angel by his side, he put the fire out before the fire department arrived without it spreading to the cabinets. He ended up with minor damage but by no means was in left uninhabitable or unfixable. That was also thanks to my training on how to use a fire extinguisher and how to advise him what to do. Again, in this case I was the FIRST – first responder. I may not have been there physically but I was certainly "there" over the phone.

Lastly, and certainly most importantly due to the recent Pandemic we are facing, due to the fact that the Government has listed dispatchers under a classification status like administrative or clerical workers, that made it extremely difficult - actually almost impossible - to get Dispatchers vaccinated for COVID-19. Unless a dispatcher was also an EMT or Paramedic with a Fire Department, they weren't considered eligible for the vaccination. Honestly, that sickened me knowing that every day – myself and my staff would walk into a Police Department with Officers that were on the road and may have had potential exposure during any call for service he/she went to. However, if Dispatchers were defined as First Responders in CT we could've fallen under the category as firefighters, for example, to get the vaccine in category 1A as opposed to much further down the list.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read some of my real-life experiences.

 02/21/2022  
Jennifer A. Amendola  
City of West Haven Director of ERS (aka West Haven 911)